



Pakistani security personals arrest activists of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) party during an-anti government demonstration in Lahore yesterday.

House votes to handcuff Bush on war funds

AFP, Washington

US lawmakers Thursday voted to fund the Iraq combat in instalments of just a few months, defying President George W Bush's veto vow in the latest tussle of a political feud over control of the war.

The House of Representatives voted by 221 votes to 205 to release 43 billion dollars (32 billion euros) in emergency war funds, but told Bush he must show progress in Iraq in July, before collecting another 53 billion dollars in financing.

"This legislation ends the blank check for the president's war without end," Democratic House speaker Nancy Pelosi said.

Bush "has grown accustomed to the free hand on Iraq he had before January 4. Those days are over," she added.

The legislation now moves to the more closely divided Senate, where the split financing component appears unlikely to survive, lining up an intense round of legislative bargaining over the bill Bush will be asked to sign.

The Democrat-led House had earlier rejected a largely symbolic bid by the majority party's anti-war block to get troops out of Iraq within six months of enactment.

Under-fire Bush earlier fought back hard, after Democrats gleefully pounced on signs of softening Republican backing for his last-ditch bid to surge nearly 30,000 more troops into war-scarred Iraq.

"I'll veto the bill if it is this haphazard, piecemeal funding, and I made that clear," he said after visiting the Defence Department.

Even if Bush vetoes it, the measure sets out the House's bargaining position for the final war-funding bill, which must be worked out with the Senate and the White House. All parties hope to strike a deal on final terms by the end of May.

Bush wielded his veto for only the second time last week to strike down a bill tying war funding to a Democratic timetable to start bringing home 146,000 troops in Iraq in October, from a war which has killed 3,379 of their comrades.

Lanka needs time to down flying Tigers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka needs time to neutralise the air strike capability of Tiger rebels, a state-run daily said yesterday as the international airport shut down at night fearing guerrilla air raids.

The Daily News said government forces were in a superior position in dealing with the Tamil Tigers on ground and at sea, but the flying Tigers had plunged the country into confusion.

"The Sri Lanka air force will take time to train their people to destroy the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) air capabilities and to improve themselves," the Daily News said in its weekly "Defence Column."

"The country is now in a confused situation," the state-run paper said.

The full-page report came as the

island's only international airport, Bandaranaike International, began shutting for six hours at night following a spate of air raids by the guerrillas who criss-crossed commercial flight paths.

"The LTTE has been successful in their effort to drag the country into this unnecessary confusion due to their desperate attempts to put the government and the security forces in an inconvenient situation," the paper said.

The guerrillas have carried out three attacks against military and civilian installations and drew intense anti-aircraft fire from ground troops who failed to hit the flying rebels.

The Tigers are known to operate at least two Czech-built Zlin-143 light aircraft out of the rebel-held north of the island. The air force has bombed a clandestine air field of the guerrillas, but failed to stop

the rebels.

The Daily News report said that the military did not have a "proper" air defence system to protect its key assets and economic installations.

The authorities had feared that the Tigers, who are fighting for an independent Tamil homeland, could use the cover of a civilian aircraft to enter the airport's air space and draw fire from ground troops.

Airlines fear they could get caught up in anti-aircraft fire directed against rebel aircraft.

Under the new security measures, the airport will remain shut for six hours at night from 10:00 pm (1730 GMT) indefinitely.

Travel agents said several major airlines had yet to finalise their new schedules, leaving many travellers scrambling for flights in and out of Colombo.

India salutes 'martyrs' who battled British rule 150 yrs ago

AFP, New Delhi

India paid homage with full pomp and honour yesterday to the "martyrs" who battled British rule 150 years ago in the country's "first war of independence."

Thousands of flag-waving marchers shouting "Jai Hind" or "Long live India" converged on the Mughal-built Red Fort in Old Delhi after retracing the route of rebellious soldiers for ceremonies kicking off a year-long celebration of the bloody uprising against the mighty British empire.

The revolt has long been known as the "Indian Mutiny," but many Indian historians now say the term "mutiny" belittles what actually happened.

"The fight for freedom united people from different religions and speaking different languages," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in a speech from the ramparts of the imposing 17th-century sandstone fort.

Actors restaged the events that led to the revolt, which helped pave the way for independence 90 years later of the "jewel" in Britain's imperial crown, and dancers performed in a swirl of colour.

Security was stepped up across the capital, particularly at the Red Fort, which has been attacked in the past by Islamic militants fighting New Delhi's rule in Indian Kashmir, police said.

Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, president of the ruling Congress party, dismissed attempts by some historians to project the uprising as only a mutiny of foot soldiers, known as sepoys, and called it "the first war of independence."

"Those who thought the sun would never set on their empire were brought to their knees and forced to leave the country and that too within a century after the whole of India stood united to take charge of their destiny," she said.



With a backdrop of Jain Temples, (R) Indian performers take part in a ceremony marking India's "first war of independence" at the Mughal-built Red Fort in New Delhi yesterday. India paid homage with full pomp and honour to the "martyrs" who battled British rule 150 years ago.

Both Koreas adopt military agreement

AP, Seoul

South Korea adopted a military agreement Friday enabling the first train crossing of their heavily armed border in more than a half-century, the South's Defence Ministry said.

The planned rail test, set for Thursday, would be the first time trains have crossed the tightly sealed border since inter-Korean rail links were severed in the middle of the 1950-53 Korean War.

Two tracks have been reconnected as part of a series of reconciliation projects launched since the two sides held the first-ever summit of their leaders in 2000.

The test would be just a single run of trains along two restored tracks on each side of the peninsula, with regular train service between the two sides unlikely to begin

anytime soon.

The two Koreas had agreed in principle on security for the rail test earlier this week, but the adoption of a formal agreement came only after more than 30 hours of extended talks that stretched into Friday due to unspecified sticking points.

South Korea hopes the inter-Korean railways could ultimately be linked to Russia's Trans-Siberian railroad and allow an overland route connecting the peninsula to Europe significantly cutting delivery times for freight that now requires sea transport.

Economic officials from both sides agreed last month to conduct the train run, but North Korea's military had the final say on whether it goes forward because such a border crossing requires security arrangements.

16 killed in fresh Afghan violence

AFP, Kandahar

Four policemen and a dozen Taliban were killed in fresh violence in southern Afghanistan, officials said Friday.

Ten militants were killed when war planes bombed a village in the southern province of Helmand, a district governor said.

The air strike was in Sangin district, where provincial authorities said 21 civilians were killed in coalition bombing raids targeting the Taliban late Tuesday.

Afghan and coalition forces estimate a "significant number of Taliban fighters" were killed, the US-led coalition said in a statement Friday. It said there were civilian casualties but the number was being investigated.

In a separate incident, four policemen and two more insurgents were killed when fighting erupted late Thursday after a group of the extremist militants attacked a police post, provincial police chief Ali Shah Ahmadi told AFP.



A Nepalese motorcyclist speaks to the petrol attendant at a private petrol pump in Kathmandu yesterday. Nepal has been hit by fuel shortages after a state-run Indian oil company cut supplies to the Himalayan nation by 40 percent.